Chapter 3

3. MILITARY MISSION

BRIGADE MISSION

Be prepared to deploy rapidly in the Pacific theater and worldwide as directed to support contingency operations, and if necessary to defeat enemy forces in operations other than war or with mission specific augmentation, fight and win in a major regional conflict.

3-1 General

The primary military mission of Fort Wainwright and U.S. Army Alaska after the Cold War has been peacetime deployment to support U.S. interests worldwide, the defense of Alaska, and coordination of Army National Guard and Reserve activities in the state. Most USARAK combat forces, 172nd Infantry Brigade (Separate), are at Fort Wainwright, with Fort Richardson as the primary support base.

Subordinate commands to the Brigade include the "Manchus" of the 4th Battalion, 9th Infantry; 1st Battalion, 17th Infantry; 706th Support Battalion; 4th Battalion, 11th Field Artillery; 567th Engineer Company; 21st Signal Company; 6th Military Intelligence Company; and A Troop, 4th Battalion, 9th Cavalry. The Arctic Support Brigade also has units at Fort Wainwright, including Special Troops Battalion; 4th Battalion, 123rd Theater Aviation; 203rd Personnel Service Battalion; 267th Finance Support

Battalion; 98th Direct Support Maintenance Company; and Law Enforcement Command. U.S. Marines have been using Fort Wainwright in recent years for annual training.

During 1994, 3,976 active duty soldiers were stationed on Fort Wainwright. About 7,900 family members are part of the Fort Wainwright community, as are 1,802 civilian employees.

The U.S. Air Force (USAF) is a major user of Fort Wainwright for routine training and Major Flying Exercises. The USAF uses Stuart Creek Impact Area as its primary tactical air-to-ground weapons range, and for low and high altitude bombing by B1 and B52 aircraft. The Yukon Measurement and Debriefing System, a computerized system that can create "air wars" of up to 36 aircraft simultaneously, has been installed on YTA. USAF pilots are debriefed to show how they reacted to enemy aircraft and various other simulated conditions. The Stuart Creek Impact Area is equipped with USAF targets, manned radar emitters, anti-aircraft threat simulators, and electronic scoring sensors (Figure 4-1).

Typically one MFE is conducted between February and April, four exercises between May and August, and one exercise between October and November. This results in USAF total use of YTA for about two or three hours each morning and afternoon during the two-week exercises. COPE Thunder, an USAF MFE formerly conducted at Clark AFB in the Philippines, is now conducted at Fort Wainwright and other areas.

The Blair Lakes Impact Area is primarily used by the Air Force for gunnery and an emergency jettison area.

3-2 Effects of Military Mission on Natural Resources

The conservation of natural resources and the military mission will not be mutually exclusive.[5]

Fort Wainwright's missions have included a variety of uses on its lands. Over the years, light infantry, mechanized infantry, artillery, special forces, and assault aircraft have used Fort Wainwright for training.

3-2a Past and Current Military Mission Land Use

Early mission activities at Fort Wainwright were, for the most part, localized. One of the most extensive impacts was the construction of the original landing strip and associated buildings. This involved the removal of soil and native vegetation and replacement with gravel. Most land outside the cantonment area was left undeveloped, affected only by training impacts. The TFTA is relatively unaffected by military developments with exception of clearings for airstrips and targetry. The YTA is more affected by development; primarily roads on tops of ridges, a combat landing strip, old bunker and missile sites, and targetry clearings.

Noise from military training potentially affects natural resources by disturbing wildlife behavior. Noise sources include munitions firing and impact, low flying aircraft, and troop maneuver (both mechanized and pedestrian). Munitions produce the greatest noise levels, ranging from 112 to 190 dB(C). C-weighted (artillery fire, sonic booms, and explosions) and small arms sound levels have not been calculated for Fort Wainwright. However, there is little evidence disturbance to wildlife is significant over time. No adverse effects of noise on wildlife have been observed on Fort Wainwright (Bonito, 1980).

There are also positive effects of the military mission on natural resources. The most significant is USARAK's commitment to natural resources management, including minimizing and mitigation of military mission damage. This commitment is beneficial for both natural resources in general and people who use them.

The presence of Fort Wainwright preserves native ecosystems by preventing development and municipal expansion, and by ensuring that competing land uses are conducted in a manner that protects the environment. Natural resources management considerations and safety demands associated with the training mission limit other, potentially more damaging land uses. Damage from training activities will be repaired under the Land Rehabilitation and Main-

[5]AR 200-3, *Natural Resources - Land, Forest and Wildlife Management*, para 2-11.

tenance (LRAM) component of the Integrated Training Area Management (ITAM) program.

The success of Fort Wainwright's conservation efforts is evidenced by its diverse, self-sustaining natural resources. The installation is an important calving ground for moose, a nesting area for trumpeter swans, and habitat for hundreds of other native plants and animals.

As a part of the master plan, the land has been separated into three general land uses types: urban areas, training areas, and impact areas. These land use types are shown in Figure 3-2a. Military use differs within these areas. This in turn, affects public access, and determines the natural resource management activities that can occur in each general land use type.

3-2a(1) Urban Areas

Land use in the cantonment area is primarily permanent and semi-permanent buildings, urban terrain, and improved grounds. Military use of urban areas is primarily dedicated to small unit training, classroom training, marching, foot training, etc. Impacts from military activities include slight soil disturbance, runoff from streets and parking lots, noise from the airfield, etc.

3-2a(2) Training Areas

Training areas are where most field-oriented military training occurs. Land use includes firing ranges, maneuver training, bivouacs, foot training, artillery firing points, landing zones, drop zones, etc. Military use is primarily large to small unit training, weapons firing, and vehicular maneuvers. Impacts from military use include earth moving, excavation, vehicle rutting, minor soil disturbance, noise, vegetation disturbance, destruction of a few spruce trees under four inches, etc.

Vehicles can damage soil and vegetation when moving across the landscape. Fort Wainwright has 818,710 acres (Johnston, 1988) suitable for cross-country maneuver. Small units use the road system of the cantonment area for field training exercises. Some maneuver damage occurs when Small Unit Support Vehicles (SUSVs) are used in wetland areas. The YTA is utilized year-round, but access is largely limited to the road system due to the steep terrain and thick vegetative cover.

TFTA is used primarily for winter field training exercises (December through April). Large force-on-force exercises have not been held on TFTA since the 1989 Brimfrost Exercise. Summer training on TFTA is restricted to small, non-mechanized units, which are helicopter-dropped into the area. Removal of the insulating vegetation mat in areas with perched water tables or underground watercourses can cause deep-rutted trails and impoundment of water in the tracks.

Maneuver is a source of damage on the installation, though not on a large scale. Large military units have not been conducting force-on-force maneuvers in recent years, and heavy, tracked equipment is not used on Fort Wainwright. Damage is most severe during spring breakup (spring thaw), especially to roads used by troops and others.

Human waste is a problem in areas used regularly during the winter, especially wooded areas near the cantonment area. USARAK's range regulation (USARAK Reg. 350-2) specify procedures for disposal of human waste during field training exercises at different times of the year. These procedures may be more strict in the future with implementation of the proposed range regulation changes (U.S. Army Alaska, 1995).

3-2a(3) Impact Areas

Impact areas are used to contain fired or launched ammunition and explosives, and the resulting fragments, debris, and components. Public and military access is not allowed, unless escorted by Explosives Ordnance Detachment personnel due to the extreme hazard of unexploded ordnance.

Impact damage occurs on 65,964 acres of impact areas on Fort Wainwright. Munitions damage soil, vegetation, and wildlife upon impact. Other sources of damage from impact include widespread deposition of shrapnel and toxic residues. Fort Wainwright minimizes environmental damage to the impact area by imposing restrictions on firing and seasonal use.

Operation of USAF equipment has significant impacts on natural resources, particularly on YTA.

These activities require an extensive road system that is used year-round. Road and other access impacts are most noticeable on areas with steep slopes. However, roads are well maintained and drainage is generally good, which minimizes erosion. Removal of vegetation around targetry and construction of access roads for electronic monitoring equipment can be locally significant. USAF use of the Blair Lakes Impact Area on Tanana Flats generally involves inert practice munitions that cause very limited damage.

USAF conducts decontamination operations on the Stuart Creek Impact Area. Each year, all unexploded ordnance and inert residue are cleared to a radius of at least 1,000 feet from each of the Air Force's tactical targets. Additionally, access ways into the tactical targets and 100 feet on either side of the access ways are also cleared each year.

3-2a(4) Land Bridge Corridor

USARAK has established a land bridge corridor linking Fort Wainwright TFTA and Fort Greely through a land use permit with the state. This corridor, on state-owned lands, is about eight miles long and 270 yards wide, paralleling the Tanana River. The permit allows the Army to construct a winter trail. The trail is approximately 20 feet wide, except for occasional two-lane sections, which are approximately 40 feet wide. Use of the corridor avoids using roads to travel about 160 miles for this transition. The corridor provides a 1,222,000-acre contiguous training area, capable of supporting large force-on-force operations (U.S. Army Alaska, 1996).

USARAK has used this corridor since the 1960s by obtaining a year-to-year permit from the state. The most recent use occurred in the 1970s. A recently concluded action established this corridor on a recurring basis, using a limited land-use permit from the state. No land changed ownership.

Effects on natural resources was minimized by restricting use of the corridor to only winter months (November 15-April 15). Effects of this proposed action are described in the draft Environmental Assessment (U.S. Army Alaska, 1996). Strict ice bridge construction specifications prohibiting riverbank grading minimizes damage to streams and rivers. Vehicles are restricted to prepared rights-of-way. Vegetation is cleared when frozen, using hydro-axes and hand cutting to minimize damage to permafrost. Soil disturbance is prohibited. Military activity other than transportation between Fort Wainwright and Fort Greely is prohibited, including bivouacking, off-trail maneuver, live-fire training, and storage of fuel or hazardous materials.

Current plans are for limited use of this corridor, as large force-on-force maneuvers are not scheduled as they have been in the past. This land bridge corridor action is in anticipation of such use should these large-scale exercises be repeated in the future.

3-2b Future Mission Impacts on Natural Resources

It is difficult to quantify effects of future military activities on natural resources at Fort Wainwright due to the uncertainty involved with military training. If the mission remains unchanged, impacts on natural resources will remain similar to those today. Construction of a Platoon Battle Course is planned, which would require tree clearing. However, funding has "slipped" for this facility, and it is unlikely it will be completed before 2002.

Future mission changes could be more destructive to natural resources than the light infantry training of today. Any move toward mechanized or armored training would add significantly to maneuver damage. There are no plans for such mission changes at this time. If large force-on-force military maneuvers were re-instituted on Tanana Flats, impacts to resources would be similar to those in the past. Restricting such training to times when Tanana Flats was frozen minimized effects. Again, there are no plans for such large-scale operations at this time.

3-3 Natural Resources Limitations on the Military Mission

Military training is affected by limitations imposed by natural resources on Fort Wainwright. Most limitations involve wetlands protected by Executive Order, Federal laws, and Army policies.

The elimination of all white phosphorous munitions use was imposed on Fort Wainwright in 1991. White phosphorus is commonly used to mark targets for

air strikes, and without its use the Army and Air Force must rely on lasers. Another impact to Fort Wainwright is that artillery units that normally trained at Eagle River Flats on Fort Richardson must utilize Fort Wainwright for training that is now restricted at Fort Richardson.

Another restriction that affects Fort Wainwright's military mission is the prohibition on digging in wetlands without permits. Time (up to 180 days) required to obtain permits has delayed construction, which must be completed during summer. If funding is received in February, it is often too late to accomplish work during the summer due to time requirements in obtaining wetland permits.

Other limitations on training are imposed by terrain characteristics. Steep slopes and dense woodland, such as found in YTA, and wetlands, such as virtually all of Tanana Flats, are difficult barriers to maneuvering. Training on TFTA is restricted to winter (U.S. Army Alaska, undated) when the ground is frozen, allowing troop movement while protecting wetland. However, varied terrain features offer realistic challenges to small unit maneuver, and learning to navigate through them is valuable training.

Military training in the Tanana Flats is also restricted during moose calving season.